

Durs Grünbein and the Poetry of Science

K Leeder

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It has often been pointed out that the late 1980s and 1990s saw a paradigm shift in German poetry. This chimed with the coming to prominence of a new cohort of poets, those born in the late 1950s and 1960s, and ushered in a new understanding of the poetic enterprise. In his authoritative overview of the period, Hermann Korte draws attention to the 'generational shift' and the increased reflexivity of the new poetry. 1 Other critics have pointed out the level of abstraction and difficulty inherent in it. 2 While drawing out the overriding preoccupations and tendencies, however, Korte also rightly insists on the tension between the sheer waywardness of groupings and impulses characterizing this most various and vigorous of poetic moments. 3 In retrospect one of the most significant of these can be seen to be what Peter Geist calls the 'paradigm shift from a historical interrogation of reality to one drawing on the natural sciences'. 4 Korte, too, sees the rapprochement between the two spheres of knowledge (poetry and science) as one of the key developments of the 1990s, and others have identified what has been termed a 'scientific turn', a 'cognitive turn' or the rise of the poeta doctus as the defining characteristic of these years. 5 This chapter seeks to read Grünbein's intense engagement with the natural sciences up to c. 1995 against the backdrop